OPUNTIA 273

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FINIS
by Dale Speirs

This is the final print issue of OPUNTIA. On 2014-03-31, Canada Post raises postage rates to ruinous levels, not by the usual one or two cents per annum, but by breathtaking amounts. I am a comfortable upper-middle-class pensioner but I won't be for long if I keep mailing out print copies.

No one has been a stronger supporter of the Papernet than I. From issue #1 in March 1991 until now, this zine has only been available as hardcopy. But the future has a different idea, and it matters not what I think or devoutly wish. I must acknowledge the reality. The next issue, OPUNTIA #274, will be posted online, at www.efanzines.com and any other Websites I can find that will archive zines.

If you publish your zine as a pdf, no paper copy is required by me anymore. If you are on www.efanzines.com, I'll see your zine there since I subscribe to their automatic notification service. If you post elsewhere, please email me a pdf of your zine. You can send me paper zines if you have an email address that I can reply to for letters of comment. Because OPUNTIA was mailed at the first increment of postage weight, I won't save any money sending paper letters of comment via real mail since they would be the same rate.

Canada Post is losing money on letter mail, making a profit on unaddressed mail, and working hard to become the premiere parcels service. It will survive because it has 6,600 postal outlets, more points of presence than any retailer in Canada. In fact, it has announced that the number of outlets will be increased. Almost all of the current outlets are in drug stores, convenience stores, and the like, and I suspect that the few remaining post offices run directly by Canada Post will be quietly eliminated by attrition over the next few years. Also on the chopping block are the gold-plated pensions enjoyed by posties.

All door-to-door deliveries will end, which only affects the one-third of Canadians in older neighbourhoods who still have lettercarrier service. All suburbs built since 1986 only get cluster box service, and rural areas likewise. Saturday delivery was done away with in 1969, but there is talk of eliminating one or two weekday deliveries to cluster boxes.

Canada Post will survive. Fedex and UPS are poor at serving areas outside the big cities. The Internet may have destroyed letter mail, but the parcels business is booming since goods ordered online still have to be physically delivered. 3-D printers will probably begin to nibble into the parcels business in about ten years. Right now the printers are where personal computers were in the 1980s, only for first-adopter techies. I don't expect to live long enough to see 3-D printers destroy the factories and

warehouses, but those of you in your twenties or thirties probably will. Canada Post has www.epost.ca which is a secure Website where companies send monthly bills for customers to access. I've already started using it. My utilities, natural gas, and telephone bills are sent to that site, I get an automatic notification to my email when a bill is sent in, and I can look at the bills, past and present on the site.

I've already been using automatic debit for bill payments for years like most Canadians, and my pension and oil royalties are deposited automatically. The petroleum industry uses a common Website called JIBLink, where I can log in and see my royalty statements. Most of my other investments still pay by cheque or send paper statements, but that will change with time.

I have a strict rule that all my daily expenses are paid out of my pension and oil royalties. I am preserving all my other capital investments against the day when the pension no longer keeps up with inflation, or if I have to liquidate them in advanced old age if the kids put me in a nursing home (may God forbid). Since OPUNTIA is a luxury, I will not use up capital to keep the paper edition going. But this zine will carry on in its pdf incarnation.

See you in the next world.

FOUR STRONG WINDS
by Dale Speirs

Mene Tekel Upharsin.

THE BIG SHIFT (2013, hardcover) by Darrell Bricker and John Ibbitson looks at the major demographic shifts currently happening in Canada. The centre of population is slowly moving west, the balance of power already has, and the immigrants settling in southern Ontario are small-c conservative.

Pause for digression for my non-Canadian readers: Because Canada's two major federal political parties are called the Conservatives and the Liberals, it is the custom to distinguish political philosophies from political parties by the terms small-c and small-l. Someone who is a small-l liberal does not necessarily support the Liberal party. In Alberta, as an example, both the governing Progressive Conservative party and the opposition Wildrose party are small-c conservatives. They just disagree on the practical details of conservatism.

For most of Canada's history, the elite ruling classes were based in Toronto and Montréal. Ibbitson refers to them as the Laurentian Consensus, which was small-l liberal. The thesis of this book is that the Laurentian Consensus has lost control but is only just now realizing it. Power in Canada has shifted from the traditional mass media (newspapers and broadcasters), Toronto/Montréal business boardrooms, and eastern university professors to Westerners and the immigrant suburban middle class.

The Laurentian Consensus can't understand why federal Tories have been so successful in the last few elections. Torontonians living in high-rise towers and Vancouverites in overpriced condos or rentals haven't a clue. Instead of embracing the welfare state created by the Laurentian Consensus, modern immigrants are entrepreneurs who prefer lower taxes and fewer subsidies. The Laurentian Consensus divide Canada into Québec, Ontario, and the regions, whereas the reality today is Alberta, Ontario, and the regions.

The Laurentian Consensus established and believe the myth that Canada was the union of the French and English, with a few percentage points of ethnics to do the laundry and scrub toilets. They can't understand why Westerners resent official bilingualism in provinces where French isn't even the third or fourth language. The prairies were colonized by eastern Europeans and Scandinavians, who soon outnumbered the British and who did not celebrate the Glorious Twelfth. To the Laurentian Consensus, the Maritime provinces and aboriginal Reserves are places to warehouse poor folk who can't afford bus fare to Toronto.

The Laurentian Consensus usually supported the Liberal party but not always. The growth of suburban Ontario caught the high-rise politicos off guard. The federal Tories learned from their mistakes, while the Liberals coasted on the assumption that modern immigrants are the same as previous generations of immigrants, who were mostly small farmers and younger sons. Modern immigrants, who make up half of southern Ontario's population and one-third of Greater Vancouver, come from war-torn or corrupt countries. They are more interested in low taxes rather than subsidizing cultural theatres. They want law and order, not same-sex marriages. The Tories were the first to realize this. Prime Minister Stephen Harper is despised by small-l liberals but considered a good man by small-c conservatives. The southern Ontario immigrants and the Westerners are now a majority in Canada. This means the Tories don't have to pander to Québec or the Maritime provinces anymore.

Bricker and Ibbitson go on to discuss Québec. In the last election, the Tories only won five seats there, which liberated them from having to curry favour with francophones. Québec is facing a severe demographic crisis. It has the oldest population in Canada, and its young adults are heading out west where the jobs are. Most immigrants bypass it because French is a minor language on the world stage. Of those who do settle there, 90% leave within two years after they discover that Québec has the highest taxes in North America.

In the Maritimes, Bricker and Ibbotson note, the problem is the belief that unemployment insurance is a birthright. It is normal to work a few months in the fisheries and then live on the pogey the rest of the year. For a century, Ontario protected its manufacturers with high tariffs and looted the prairies. The final and most conspicuous example of this was the 1979 National Energy Policy, which imposed $50 billion in oil royalties to subsidize Ontario and Québec.

The western provinces of today are not as the Laurentian Consensus still think. Calgary's mayor is a Muslim, the only large North American city just so. Toronto has Rob Ford, a crack-smoking redneck, leading to the joke among the chattering classes that the two cities elected each other's mayor. Alberta has the youngest population of the provinces and the most with post-secondary degrees or diplomas, as well as the lowest taxes and no provincial sales tax.

Bricker and Ibbitson look to the future of Canada in the second half of the book. At this point, the book suddenly changes from a political history to a small-business self-help manual on how to deal with the big shift.

The Laurentian Consensus has been crippled by the rise of the Internet. The media outlets of Canada were centred in Toronto and Montréal. They decided what would go on the front page and

influenced the priorities of government leaders. The destruction of mass media in Canada by the Internet is no different than the rest of the world. Journalism is not a career with any good opportunities. The banks (Canada has 24 banks, not thousands like the USA) have relocated their main offices to Calgary because that's where the money is.

The back room deals are now made in the Petroleum Club in Calgary, not the Empire Club in Toronto. The big shift is not going to reverse itself, and the Laurentian Consensus will dwindle away.

Tar Baby.

SUN RISE (2012, hardcover) by Rick George is an account of his time at Suncor as it became the major player in the Athabasca Tar Sands. Strictly speaking, they are oil sands, but the name is too firmly entrenched to change. Tar is a residue of resinous wood such as pine or spruce, whereas the Athabasca deposits originate from petroleum, derived from the decay of microscopic marine algae (and not dinosaurs as many people believe). The sands are just below the surface in northeastern Alberta and were originally a deeper oil field that was exposed by glaciers during the last Ice Age. This allowed the volatile components of the oil to escape into the atmosphere, leaving behind the heavy molecules collectively known as bitumen.

Some of the bitumen has been seeping into the rivers since the Ice Age ended, and native tribes used it for waterproofing canoes and teepees. The rivers in northeastern Alberta cut through the sands and exposed them to view of European explorers, and the bitumen constantly seeping into the water taught them to be careful where they got their drinking water. Contamination of the water is natural, although environmentalists try to blame it all on the open-pit mines.

The huge volume of oil sands was long known to oil companies but the big problem was extracting the bitumen, which is tightly bound to clay and sand particles and must be steamed off. Pilot projects by the government of Alberta proved the method in the 1930s, but the cost was much higher than the price of oil until the 1990s, so for two generations not much happened.

Rick George was a Colorado farm boy who worked for Sun Oil, headquartered in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The company operates the Sunoco service stations, and had invested in the first commercial Athabasca mine, Great Canadian Oil Sands, in 1967. The GCOS was rolled into Suncor a few years later but lost $100 million a year due to frequent fires, labour strife, nationalism by the Liberal Party then governing in Ottawa, and low oil prices. Morale was so low at Suncor that management had to issue written orders to employees to attend the Christmas party.

When George was appointed head of Suncor in 1991, he worried that it was the end of his career. Production problems continually plagued both Suncor and its neighbour Syncrude. Winters in Athabasca averaged -30°C between December to March. Grease froze solid and vehicle engines had to be left running 24/7 so they wouldn't freeze. It cost $20 to produce a barrel of synthetic crude from bitumen at the time, but the price of oil then was $12 to $15.

The first thing George realized was that the company was running Suncor as if it was pumping oil instead of what it actually is, an open-pit mine. The difference is that oil fields use a continuous flow process, while mines operate in batch mode. Three gigantic bucket-wheel excavators were in use, with the excavated sand funneled into kilometres-long conveyor belts to take it to the steam separators.

A basic rule of engineering is that the more complicated a machine is, the more it breaks down. One bucket wheel out of service meant a one-third loss of income, and frequently two were under repair at the same time. If a conveyor belt tore loose, it shut down both the excavator and the steam separator. At a cost of $120 million, George converted the project to ten power shovels and fifty 200-ton dump trucks. This gave the operation multiple redundancy and reduced the size of any stoppage to single-digit percentages. When a machine failed, the rest could keep running.

Head office in Philadelphia was hostile to Suncor because of its history and made it difficult to fund improvements. George convinced them to let Suncor become an independent publicly-traded corporation. Within three years, Suncor was worth more than its parent Sun Oil. Suncor also moved its head office from Toronto to Calgary, which made more sense and saved a fortune in airline tickets. Calgary is the capital of Canada's petroleum industry, where the vast majority of petroleum companies are headquartered.

George's major problem then became politics. First, the Trudeau Liberals initiated their disastrous National Energy Policy, which looted $50 billion in oil royalties from Alberta to pay off Ontario and Québec voters. That was followed by environmentalists denouncing widespread devastation by the open-pit mines. The actual facts were different. Only 0.02% of the boreal forest is disturbed by the mines, who restore the area afterwards. 1% of the Athabasca River's flow is diverted to the mines, compared to 75% of the Niagara River above the falls for electrical generation in southern Ontario and then used downstream for urban water supplies and sewage. Open-pit mines make good visuals, though. There are no protest marches at Niagara Falls.

The other big moment in the spotlight for George was Suncor's takeover of Petro-Canada in 2009, a delicious irony. Petro-Canada had been created by the Trudeau Liberals during the

NEP to barge its way into the oil industry. Like other government-run businesses, it proved to be a boondoggle and was eventually privatized. Suncor then bought it out, by which time the NEP had been dead for decades.

Major changes are now occurring in the oil sands industry. 80% of the oil sands are too deep to excavate, so they will be exploited by steam-assisted gravity drainage, which is forcing steam through underground pipes to melt the bitumen and then pumping it out from horizontal wells. The price of oil is staying in the $85 to $105 per barrel range, which is good because the new projects need $50 to $80 to stay viable. Peak Oil has not gone away. The Bakken and other shale oil projects in the USA only exist because of high oil prices and are already showing signs of depletion. OPEC nations are pumping the same or less amount of oil, and keeping more of it within themselves for internal use. Big oil is here to stay.

Ink In The Blood.

ALBERTA'S WEEKLY NEWSPAPERS (2012, trade paperback) by Wayne Arthurson is subtitled "Writing The First Draft Of History". I do a lot of historical research and have spent countless hours scrolling through microfilmed newspapers, hence my interest in this book.

European explorers and fur traders had been traversing what is now Alberta since the 1700s, and occasional settlers appeared by the 1860s, but it wasn't until the transcontinental railroad crossed southern Alberta in the summer of 1883 that settlement began in a big way. In 1891 a north-south mainline was built from Calgary northwards 300 km to Edmonton, and both settlements began to grow. The first post office was opened in Alberta in 1876, and the first newspaper published in 1880, the EDMONTON BULLETIN. In that year, Edmonton and Calgary were still tiny hamlets huddled around forts for protection from the native tribes. Fort Edmonton was a Hudson's Bay Company trading post. HBC was founded in 1670 and is still in business today as a department store. Fort Calgary was not a trading post but a detachment of the North West Mounted Police, today the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

The first newspaper publisher in Alberta was Frank Oliver, a young Toronto printer who had heard that the future was out west. The premiere issue of the EDMONTON BULLETIN was tiny, 5" by 7" (smaller than OPUNTIA) and had four pages of 6-point type, a single sheet folded on half. For two years it was Alberta's only newspaper. Over time it evolved into a daily newspaper, competing in later years with the still-extant EDMONTON JOURNAL, but it ceased publication in 1951. The second newspaper in Alberta was at Fort Macleod, halfway between Calgary and the American border.

This settlement was a NWMP fort. Two constables, Charles Wood and Si Saunders, resigned their commissions and put out the first issue of the MACLEOD GAZETTE in 1882. It is still published today and is Alberta's longest running newspaper.

As railroads spread through Alberta, homesteaders and villages followed. Every siding with two log cabins and a general store proclaimed itself as the next Chicago. (No place wanted to be the next Toronto, which was notorious throughout Canada as a blue-law city where having fun wasn't just a sin, it was against the law.) Many of the early publishers in Alberta were itinerant printers who moved from one village to the next. The most famous was Bob Edwards, who produced newspapers in a variety of villages before finally settling in Calgary with his EYE OPENER newspaper. His frequent moves were usually encouraged by upper-class citizens who didn't like his "Mayor, Secretary In Boudoir Shock" style of writing. He was never actually tarred and feathered but the suggestion was often made and not entirely in jest. Cowtowners were more forgiving, and his paper sold 30,000 copies per issue until his death in 1922.

In High River, today a half-hour drive south of Calgary, Charles Clark began publishing the HIGH RIVER TIMES. His grandson was Joe Clark, later to become Prime Minister of Canada. Joe's first paying job was to deliver newspapers for his grandfather.

By the time Alberta became a province in 1905, it had just under 100 weekly newspapers. Publishers are optimists by nature, so the mortality rate and ownership turnover of rural newspapers was high. In the days of hand-set 6-point type and hand-powered presses, it was hard physical labour to put out a weekly newspaper. All of them did job printing on the side, a steady source of income from printing letterheads, business and legal forms, and posters (lost horses were common in those days).

This book covers the events that affected Alberta newspapers, from the immigration boom that peaked in 1912 to the big wars. World War One took disproportionately larger casualties of young men from rural areas dying overseas. The 1918 influenza cut off entire branches of family trees. The Great Depression was made worse by the drought that started at the same time. In 1935, William "Bible Bill" Aberhart brought the Social Credit party to power in Alberta by a landslide, and forthwith tried to muzzle all the Alberta newspapers. They united as one, and fought the Accurate News and Information Act all the way to the Supreme Court of Canada, where it was ruled unconstitutional in 1938.

Newspaper publishers were not necessarily enlightened about all aspects of civil liberties. The same ones who fought the Socreds also demanded that the Chinese immigrants be sent back to their ancestors' home. During World War One when Ukrainians were

interned as enemy aliens, and again during World War Two when the Japanese got the same treatment, the rural newspaper editors cheered. Japanese immigrants living in British Columbia were sent to internment camps in Alberta. The editors then fretted that the Japanese might stay in their neighbourhoods after the war because they had nothing to go back to in British Columbia, all their property there having been confiscated.

In February 1947, the general topic of conversation in Alberta turned to oil after the Leduc #1 well came in as a gusher. Alberta had been using natural gas for heating buildings for decades but its oil wells were shallow, few, and low producing. Leduc #1 demonstrated that the province was floating on deep oil, and the well is accepted as the single most important milestone in Alberta's post-war history. The oil industry started off in a big way and the general prosperity boosted weekly newspaper revenues.

The vast majority of newspaper owners were returned veterans or second-generation owners descended from pioneers. This created a major problem in the 1980s when that group of newspaper owners retired. Few could find children, nephews, or nieces who wanted to take over the family business. The only choice was to sell out to the newspaper chains. A second problem was that the advent of computerized printing presses was extremely expensive, beyond the capital of families, and only the big chains could afford them.

The result was considerable consolidation. Groups of rural newspapers were all printed at one centralized press and trucked out to the villages. Most of the copy was regional boilerplate, with a few articles by a local correspondent.

In the 1990s, the Alberta provincial government made its final push to pave all secondary rural roads, a project which had begun after the war and still is in process in the remotest areas today. By the Millennium, almost all villages were connected by paved roads to large towns and cities. Many of them then died off because it was easier to shop in town. The Internet came along next, killing off paid rural newspapers and replacing them with free shopper papers that had a bit of local content. They all have Websites but free print editions are still useful.

Alternative Cowtown.

UNBUILT CALGARY (2012, coffee-table softcover) by Stephanie White looks at the alternative history of Calgary, the proposed projects that never happened or were only partially built. Had they been completed as planned, the city would have looked considerably different. Calgary has always been a boom-or-bust city, growing in sudden spurts with grandiose architectural dreams and then suddenly crashing to a halt for a decade or two.

On August 28, 1875, "F" Troop of the North West Mounted Police, today the Calgary Detachment of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, forded the Bow River just above the junction of the Elbow River and built a fort. Sgt. George Clifton King, later to be Mayor and Postmaster of Calgary, was the first man across the river. In 1975, City Council officially declared him to be the First Citizen of Calgary. A hamlet grew up around the fort but little population growth occurred until the transcontinental railroad arrived in 1883 and a north/south line was built in 1892. That secured Fort Calgary's economy.

Calgary (the "Fort" fell out of use soon after the railroad arrived) grew into a company town with the Canadian Pacific Railway station at its centre, both physically and economically. The tracks came in south of the fort and the hamlet, and to this day represent the southern boundary of the downtown core. The core is a triangle roughly 3 km long and 1 km at its apex. It is bounded on the north by a bend of the Bow River, the east by the Elbow River, and pinches out to the west where the CPR tracks angle over to the riverbank and travel along the base of a high escarpment.

The city has had its ups and downs. A natural gas and wheat boom collapsed in 1913, followed by World War One, stasis for a decade, and then, just as it seemed another boom was starting, the Panic of 1929, the Great Depression, and World War Two. Leduc #1, the oil well that transformed Alberta in 1947, triggered expansion of the city in the 1950s and 1960s.

In those days, rivers and natural areas were considered obstacles to what was thought of good planning. A proposal to move the railroad tracks to the Bow River bank finally triggered an uproar that led to a change of heart. Then began a decades-long conversion of riverbanks throughout the city from freeways to public parks connected by a continuous pathway system.

The first attempt at central planning for Calgary began in 1911 when an English landscape architect named Thomas Mawson was invited to submit a plan for directed growth. He modeled it on European cities, with wide plazas, channels fed by the Bow River for rowing eights, and massive buildings that Albert Speer would have thought excessive. Mawson's plan was filed and forgotten because it wouldn't have worked.

There are no wide plazas in Calgary to this day because they are unusable in winter, and walking through them to work would be like a trek across the tundra in the face of a blizzard. Calgary's outdoor gathering spaces today are small for a good reason. The Olympic Plaza is only a quarter city block, surrounded by tall buildings that shield against the wind. We do have large open parks, but they are abandoned in the winter, something Mawson and succeeding landscapers never understood.

Kayaking and canoeing on the Bow River usually claim one or two lives per year, and no Cowtowner in his right mind would consider it a place for rowing eights. The rivers in southwestern Alberta are glacier-fed mountain rivers. None are navigable by anything bigger than a rowboat, and their water levels fluctuate between raging torrents during the spring melts of June to knee-deep water in the August to October dry season. When Sgt. King rode his horse across the Bow River and became First Citizen back in late August 1875, he didn't get the soles of his boots wet.

During the post-1947 oil boom, Calgary adopted the American suburb plan of urban sprawl and freeways. Cowtowners have lamented the demolition of pioneer-era buildings but no one has launched a campaign to save the architectural atrocities of the 1950s and 1960s. The second oil boom of the late 1970s triggered a rush to clear out downtown lots in anticipation of building glass towers. The collapse of 1982 left Calgary with huge vacancies all over the core. One of those spaces was to have been filled by the Civic Centre, a massive complex of buildings that would not have been out of place in East Germany. The project was voted down in a referendum. It was eventually filled in by the 1990s on a piecemeal basis with smaller buildings that didn't remind one so much of Orwell.

On the east side of City Hall was a slum called East Village, which was swept away just in time for 1982. Only now, in the 2010s, are the vacant lots being filled in by townhouses and set-back condo towers that pay attention to the pedestrian. The unbuilt proposals would have lined the streets with glass towers and created wind tunnels everywhere. So the hard times of the 1980s weren't all that bad.

Another part of unbuilt Calgary was a proposal to move the Via Rail train station from the basement of the CPR station to a palatial building in the East Village. It died in 1980 and fortunately so, because intercity passenger train service died in the prairie provinces in 1981 when Via Rail cancelled its transcontinental passenger service. Had the edifice been built, it would have become a white elephant before it was completed.

Not all might-have-beens are in the downtown core. My neighbourhood was platted in 1910 but was empty prairie until the late 1950s. Where the Bow River enters Calgary on its western side was once a tatty roadside resort called Happy Valley. The Tri-Media motion picture studio bought it in 1979 and prepared plans to build Hollywood North, a complex of studios and sound stages. Those plans died with the economy in 1982. In the early 2000s, a developer turned it into a cookie-cutter suburb with the oxymoronic name Valley Ridge. No one can live there without a car to get anywhere, even the local convenience store.

Suburban planning has changed for the better. Many areas that were scheduled to be developed before the 1982 collapse involved bulldozing flat every bump in the topography and filling in any coulees or sloughs. Now it is taken for granted even by the developers that escarpments and wetlands will be preserved as natural parks, with winding pathways for joggers and dog walkers.

In looking back at Calgary's growth from a hamlet huddled around a wooden fort to a sprawling city of 1.2 million, one can't help but notice how economic recessions have played a part in checking the worst excesses of planners and architects. If the previous booms had run unhindered, Calgary today would be completely hostile to pedestrians and parks, and the downtown core would be ringed by railroads and massive freeways. Or, if Mawson or the Stalinist school of architecture had seen their plans fulfilled, the downtown would be a collection of massive stone buildings separated by long walks across wind-swept plazas instead of a dense collection of skyscrapers connected by second-floor enclosed pedestrian overpasses.

The unbuilt Calgarys never considered public transit, but modern planning, now that the worst of suburban sprawl is choking itself to death, takes it for granted. Any house within five minutes walking distance of an LRT station or on a direct bus route downtown is worth more than its more distant neighbours. Calgary stopped building new freeways through established neighbourhoods a decade ago. Now the controversies in city council meetings are about who gets to have the next LRT leg into their communities.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

[Editor's remarks in square brackets]

FROM: Lloyd Penney 2014-01-30
24 Eva Road #1706
Etobicoke, Ontario M9C 2B2

[Re: SF fandom awards] I don't do what I do for awards, for they amount to paper, plastic, wood, and metal, but when you do get one, it does feel pretty good. I think there's a fair number of people who feel that their involvement in the Auroras and the Hugos has been made unimportant by some who seem able to manipulate the results. Whether that's true or not, obviously a new group of people are winning the trophies and the old group is grumping about it. Such as it always was, I suspect.

[I consider the main problem to be weak-willed or incompetent convention organizers who don't disqualify or transfer inappropriate nominations for awards. When a Website wins an award for Best Fanzine, I blame the committee, not the entrant]

FROM: Mark Plummer 2014-01-28
59 Shirley Road
Croydon, Surrey CR0 7ES, England

You say that 1948 is considered the birth of mass-market television. In Britain I think it's usually dated to 1953, and specifically June 2, the day of the Coronation. At least that's the popular story. An article by Joe Moran in RADIO TIMES last year suggests the UK television audience was something like 20.4 million people, at a time when there were only 2.7 million sets in the country. ... Inevitably though, that popular story isn't entirely accurate, or so the RADIO TIMES argues. The pattern of new licences purchased in the early 1950s suggests "*that the sales hike for the Coronation was part of a steady, inexorable rise, not something sparked by one event. The Coronation gave television a helpful nudge, that is all.*" It goes on to claim that "*The easing of restrictions on hire purchase in July 1954 was probably more important than the Coronation in turning television into a mass medium* ... "

[I was born in 1955, so by the time I was old enough to understand, it was all over bar the shouting and television had won. I do remember when colour television came in during the middle 1960s. My father's veterinary practice was profitable enough that we were one of the first families to have a colour set. The glowing colours on the screen were most impressive, although the shows didn't seem to be much better for it. That was when I realized that good scripts and acting counted as much if not more.]

FROM: Bob Jennings 2014-01-30
29 Whiting Road
Oxford, Massachusetts 01540-2035

Television was a national fad in the early and mid-1950s which killed off dramatic and most comedy radio programming because the advertisers went where nearly instant results were being generated, which was TV. After 1958, that phenomenon fell off and advertising results between TV and radio were nearly equal. By that time, the national ad agencies, which made larger commissions from producing TV ads and handling budgets, decided that TV was a cash cow, and they stuck with it. Smaller agencies working with local and regional companies got better results with radio, and proved it time after time. By then it was too late to save the national dramatic programming that audiences had expected from the 1930s through the mid-1950s.

FROM: Joseph Nicholas 2014-01-29
15 Jansons Road
Tottenham, London N15 4JU, England

In your review of SHANGHAI STEAM, you remark en passant that "*most steampunk fans came into the field from comics and costuming*". While that might be true for Canada and the USA, in the UK there are some steampunks who are completely unaware that it has any literary antecedents at all.

A case in point might be last summer's Markfield Steampunk Convivial in Tottenham. ... There were a number of stalls selling steampunk-related gear. I bought a steampunked USB stick (appliqued leather covering with miniature brass widgets) from one young chap, and in conversation with him determined that he had come into steampunk via its music. I knew nothing of that but he for his part was completely unaware that there was a literary genre which had kickstarted all this. And then, as part of the entertainment, there was Steampunk Morris, a bonafide morris dancing troupe from Rochester who wore brass goggles and greatcoats.

I don't think that alternative history is likely to be "*supplanted by its subgenre's term*". AH is much broader than steampunk, but it just happens to be the case that steampunk is currently enjoying its moment in the sun. In consequence, airships and brass goggles predominate. But its popularity will wane, just as other subgenres have waxed and waned before it.

FROM: Ned Brooks 2014-01-29
4817 Dean Lane
Lilburn, Georgia 30047

Good review of Strugatskys' ROADSIDE PICNIC translations. The plot sounds like that of a movie which was called STALKER, made in 1979.

[The movie was in fact made from the novel. I haven't seen it.]

I Heard From: Sheryl Birkhead, John Held Jr, Murray Moore, Phlox Icona, Theo Nelson, Franz Zrilich, Loran Frazier, Catherine Groves, Ken Faig

WORLD WIDE PARTY #21

2014 will be the 21st annual World Wide Party on June 21st at 21h00 your local time. You are requested to raise a glass to your fellow denizens of zinedom at 21h00. Have a party, or devise your own method of celebrating.

ZINE LISTINGS
by Dale Speirs

[The Usual means $5 cash ($6 overseas) or trade for your zine. Americans: please don't send cheques for small amounts to Canada or overseas (the bank fee to cash them is usually more than the amount) or mint USA stamps (which are not valid for postage outside USA). US$ banknotes are still acceptable around the world.]

[SF means science fiction. An apazine is a zine for an amateur press association distro, a perzine is a personal zine, sercon is serious-constructive, and a genzine is a general zine]

The Ken Chronicles #30 (The Usual from Ken Bausert, 2140 Erma Drive, East Meadow, New York 11554-1120) Perzine with accounts of getting a suitable iPod speaker, trip reports, and his early working career. The last item should be required reading for the younger generation with degrees in uselessness who claim they can't get a decent job. Work is out there if you build a reputation for yourself as someone who knows how to do something useful, as Ken did in the auto repair business. (Or as I did in landscape maintenance and tree pruning.)

Show Me The Money #39 (The Usual from Tony Hunnicutt, Box 48161, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55448) Many zines boast how cutting edge they are because they discuss the latest rock bands or Internet fads, but completely ignore the real blood from the cuts imposed by economic systems. This zine looks at economics, the reality that affects all of us far more than Justin Bieber's latest court appearance.

Cherry Monocle - Spring 2014 (The Usual from Phlox Icona, 36 Huntington Place Drive, Atlanta, Georgia 30350) Single-sheet mail art zine, this one showing some of the light-switch plate art she has been doing.

Ray X X-Rayer #100 (The Usual from Boxholder, Box 2, Plattsburgh, New York 12901-0002) A humourous look at the UFO nuts. The benevolent aliens who are supposed to save us from ourselves were predicted to arrive as far back as the 1950s, so what's taking them so long? Also a look at alien ads at drive-in theatres and Arthur C. Clarke's vision of faxprint newspapers beamed from satellites. A brief note on Bitcoin as a conspiracy theory, although outdated since publication by the bankruptcy of several Bitcoin exchanges. (Google "Mt. Gox" or "Flexcoin" if you don't know the story.)

Brooklyn! #83 to #83.5 (US$10 cash for four issues from Fred Argoff, Penthouse L, 1170 Ocean Parkway, Brooklyn, New York 11230) A bit of everything in issue #83, from asking directions to wild parrots, local buildings, and wildlife sightings. #83.5 is about the Greenpoint district.

Christian New Age Quarterly V21#2 (US$5 from Catherine Groves, Box 276, Clifton, New Jersey 07015-0276) An extended look at the parallels in certain Buddhist and Christian texts, as well as letters of comment.

The Fossil #358 (US$15 per year from The Fossils Inc., c/o Tom Parson, 157 South Logan Street, Denver, Colorado 80209) This group records the history of zinedom from its earliest days in the 1870s when the first apas (amateur press association) were formed.

OSFS Statement #417 to #418 (The Usual from Ottawa SF Society, 18 Norice Street, Ottawa, Ontario K2G 2X5) SF clubzine with event listings, astronomy news, and other science news.

Flag #12 to #13 (The Usual from Andy Hooper, 11032 - 30 Avenue NE, Seattle, Washington 98125) SF fanzine, with an essay on Samuel Delaney's book TRITON, a look at Asimov's predictions and his legacy, and letters of comment.

The Republic Of Whimsy Official Booklet Of Hoodoos (Mail art Usual from Theo Nelson, 2611 Charlebois Drive NW, Calgary, Alberta T2L 0T5) Hoodoos are pillars of rock capped by flat plates, most commonly found in the Drumheller Badlands about a two-hour drive east of Calgary. This colour booklet has Theo's artwork depicting them.

EOD Letter #29 (The Usual from Ken Faig Jr, 2311 Swainwood Drive, Glenview, Illinois 60025-2741) Apazine for Lovecraftians, but alas, this is the final issue as Ken is retiring. It wraps up with two book reviews of weird fiction.

One Zine Review #1 ((The Usual from Loran Frazier, Box 285, Lathrop, Missouri 64465) Reviewzine that only looks at one zine but in great depth.

Northern Routes #1 to #2 (The Usual from Frederick Moe, 36 West Main, Warner, New Hampshire 03278) New apazine, with an article on the short-lived Republic of Indian Stream and various apa comments.

Grunted Warning #20 (The Usual from Stuart Stratu, Box 35, Marrickville, New South Wales 2204, Australia) Cut-and-paste zine of weird news from around the world.

The New Port News #274 (The Usual from Ned Brooks, 4817 Dean Lane, Lilburn, Georgia 30047-4720) Apazine commenting on a variety of topics.